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SHANGHAI: Two US congressmen leading the House US-China Working Group said they believe there are many opportunities for the two countries to jointly tackle the food and product safety issue.

Rick Larsen and Mark Kirk wound up their week-long trip to China on Saturday after talking to top officials on a number of issues including food and product safety, anti-narcotics and counter-terrorism, especially during the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

"I think the situation (on food and product safety) can get better," Larsen, a representative from the state of Washington, told China Daily on Saturday.

He pointed to the importance of the upcoming visit to the US by Wei Chuanzhong, vice-minister of the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ).

Larsen commented favorably on Chinese Minister of Commerce Bo Xilai's pledge several days ago that even if there is a problem with 1 percent of products, China will resolve it.

"We are happy to take that message back home," said Larsen, adding that he hoped China would take more positive steps to ensure the quality of its food and products.

On Friday, AQSIQ introduced a recall system that requires producers to recall unsafe toys and foodstuffs. Severe penalties will be handed out to producers failing to comply with the regulations.

Larsen said he wants it to be clear the food and product safety problem is not just about China, US importers should also bear responsibility and get more involved in the import process.

Before the US Congress went into recess last month, Kirk, a representative from Illinois, introduced the bipartisan Import Safety Act of 2007, which would increase penalties against importers of contaminated goods by 100 times.

Fines for food and toy safety violations resulting in death will be increased from \$500,000 to \$50 million.

Kirk said he hoped the US Food and Drug Administration staff would be stationed in China to help inspect the quality of goods bound for the US, describing the food and toy safety as a "real and emotional" issue.

"We can solve this problem together and not let it grow into something bigger," Larsen said.

Both Larsen and Kirk, co-chairs of the bipartisan US-China Working Group, also emphasized the need for more cooperation and exchanges in the fields of culture and energy.

Last month, the two congressmen unveiled a US-China Competitiveness Agenda 2007, which includes four legislative priorities to boost US ties with China and increase US competitiveness in the global marketplace.

The US-China Diplomatic Expansion Act of 2007, authored by Kirk, authorizes the construction of a new consulate in Wuhan and 10 smaller diplomatic posts in cities with more than one million people.

The bill also triples funding for public diplomacy, boosts funding for a range of language, student and teacher exchange programs and more than triples the US contribution to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.